

THE ROLE OF GESTURE IN THE NOVELS "SILK" AND "NOVECENTO" BY A. BARICCO

Rasulova M. M.

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

E -mail: munira.rasulova92@gmail.com

Abstract: Gestures in literary texts serve as an essential tool for communication, emotional expression, and symbolic representation. This study explores the role of gestures in Alessandro Baricco's novels *Silk* and *Novecento*, analyzing how they contribute to character development, narrative structure, and thematic depth. Gestures function as non-verbal cues that enhance storytelling, creating an additional layer of meaning beyond dialogue. Through the analysis of key scenes, the research demonstrates how gestures shape reader perception, influence character interactions, and reinforce the psychological and cultural context of the novels.

Keywords: gesture, literary text, non-verbal communication, Alessandro Baricco, *Silk*, *Novecento*, symbolism, mise-en-scène, narrative techniques, character development.

Gestures in literary text can be considered as an important element of communication and expression, that not only complements, but also often enhances the verbal content. Gestures have several main functions that affect the perception of text and its deep understanding: emotional expressiveness, communication between characters, symbolic meaning, characterization of characters, cultural aspects.

O. V. Fedunina identifies the following most important functions in the study of a literary work: 1) a gesture is always a sign and a symbol; 2) the communicative function of a gesture; 3) a conversation about the functions of a gesture in a verbal work is impossible without going out to characterize the narrative structure of the work [Fedunina 2017: 114].

Let's examine some of the functions of gesture in the works of Alessandro Baricco. In his "Novecento" (1994), gestures and details play an important role. In the duel scene between two pianists, Novecento and Jelly Roll, the "cigarette" is a multifunctional detail. The actions performed with a cigarette help to reveal the masterful playing of the pianist Jelly Roll, to realise how gently he played, so that even the ashes of a lit cigarette placed on the edge of the piano did not crumble:

"Jelly Roll lit a cigarette, placed it poised on the edge of the piano, sat down and began to play. [...] The cigarette was still there, on the edge of the piano: half consumed, but the ash was still all there" [Baricco 2012: 39].

In this situation, the cigarette characterizes the real time: the ash indicates the period of time during which it burns. The next function of the cigarette is to emphasize the virtuosity of Novecento's performance: his playing was so fast that the piano strings got very hot and lit the cigarette:

"Then he placed my cigarette on the edge of the piano. Unlit. And he began. [...] Novecento got up, took my cigarette. He took it back out, and it was lit" [Baricco 2012: 42].

Lest's note the importance of gestures in the situation. After playing the piano, Novecento took a burning cigarette and handed it to his opponent. The cigarette ash fell off and landed on Jelly Roll's black suit and shoe. The function of this gesture is to humiliate the character defeated

in a duel. So, the "cigarette" has only a functional purpose, symbolizing the principle of piano playing and the triumph of Novecento.

In 1996 "Seta" (Silk) was published. In this work the author uses many different techniques: close-up, details, mise-en-scene, among which gestures stand out. The author creates a logically fixed mise-en-scene technique when, purely visually, rather than verbally, the reader understands the subtext of the scene and the relationship between the characters. A girl is lying motionless beside Hara Kei, who is sitting cross-legged at a table, which is typical of Japanese traditions. Hara Kay's gesture symbolizes his power, submission to him: he runs his hand through the girl's hair, stroking her like a sleeping animal. Opposite him, on the other side of the table, there is Hervé Joncour. It is possible to notice the inconvenience of his pose: the Frenchman is sitting on the floor, at a small table. Thanks to Hervé Joncour's focalisation, this mise en scene allows the reader to understand that Hara Kei does not see the gestures and gaze of the girl who, having opened her eyes, stared intently into Herve Joncour's eyes.

The gesture of Hervé Joncour plays an important role: he took the cup with one hand, brought it to his lips, took a small sip.

Let's pay attention to the girl's movements. A. Baricco uses short sentences to show the iconic nature of the movements:

"The girl lifted her head slightly ... directed her gaze to the cup.

Slowly she turned the cup until her lips were exactly where he was drinking.

Squinted her eyes and took a sip" [Baricco 2008: 29].

Hara Kei does not see these movements, does not record them, as all his attention is directed to Hervé Joncour, he only glimpses the girl's hand. The reader's consciousness is playing out the final frame for itself. It can be assumed that due to the chosen mise-en-scene and the focalisation of Hervé Joncour, the gesture with the cup has the function of a "kissing" the girl and the Frenchman beyond Hara Kei's control.

Robert Rushing highlights another example of the use of gesture in "Silk": "the reader is obviously supposed to understand that Joncour and the girl do not need words to communicate because they find a more effective language in gestures: the girl releasing a flock of caged birds to signify her happiness" [Rushing 2003: 223].

Thus, gestures in Baricco's works are an important means of expression that help to deepen the understanding of the characters, create emotional expression by conveying their emotions and inner states, serve as a means of communication between characters, especially when words are insufficient or impossible, and also give rhythm and dynamics to the action, giving scenes additional emphasis.

So, the function of gestures is a multifaceted and integral part of communication and expression, helping to create depth and complexity in the literary text.

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